

# H1N1 Swine Flu: Health Canada apologizes, says body bags were 'routine restocking'

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A Manitoba Health Canada official apologized for sending body bags to Manitoba First Nations communities this afternoon, explaining that the over 200 post-mortem kits sent to northern communities were never intended to be part of flu kits.

Jim Wolfe, Manitoba director of Health Canada's Inuit and Aboriginal Health Branch, told reporters in Winnipeg that the body-bag shipment was a "routine restocking" of remote nursing stations to help them prepare for "unknown and unforeseen events, whether it be a plane crash, environmental disaster or pandemic."

"It is unfortunate that this has been linked exclusively with H1N1," he said. "Health Canada apologizes. We all regret the alarm caused by the stocking of this particular item."

Health Canada regularly re-stocks body bags every three or four months, he said. But especially in the case of Wasagamatch First Nation, which received roughly 30 of the bags, the number of bags delivered "was excessive."

"In this case, we overestimated," he said. "Our apology is to all First Nations."

First Nations leaders expressed outrage yesterday when dozens of body bags were delivered to remote northern communities. Already tense after a spring flu season that hit aboriginals in the province disproportionately hard, many chiefs saw the bags as insulting and culturally insensitive.

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